

NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino
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County continues to alert public to post-fire flood dangers

As part of its effort to inform the public about the dangers posed by post-fire flooding, the County of San Bernardino is mailing 113,000 warning letters to residents and property owners in the danger zone advising them that mudslides, debris flows and flash floods will likely occur with little or no warning with each rainfall for at least the next few years.

The letters are being mailed to every property north of Highland Avenue and Interstate 210 from the Los Angeles County line through Highland. It is also being sent to homes near flood-prone areas in the Fontana and San Bernardino areas. The first 33,600 of the letters were mailed on Friday. The remainder will be mailed this week.

The letter advises residents of the extreme flood risk created by the wildfires, and warns them that the floods that occurred on Christmas will likely repeat themselves many times during the next several years in the areas below the foothills stretching from the Los Angeles County line through Highland.

Residents are warned that no one can accurately predict the precise location and intensity of approaching rain, and that when heavy rainfall triggers the county's rain gauge alert system, the runoff from that rain is already occurring. Post-fire floods are not unusual in San Bernardino County. However, the recent fires mark the first time in recorded history that every foothill between the Los Angeles County line and Mentone has burned.

The letter warns residents to make sure their property is protected with sandbags and other devices available through the county, to have emergency food, medical supplies, and communication alternatives on hand, to heed storm and flood warnings, and follow a family evacuation plan.

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The letter is available in Spanish, and can be viewed at <http://www.sbcounty.gov/floodinfo>. The county is also asking newspapers in the county to publish the letter as a full-page ad as a public service to ensure that the message reaches as many residents as possible.

The letter marks the latest effort by the county to warn residents about the increased risk of flood. The county began warning residents about the flood danger from burned National Forest lands and began working to prepare flood control basins, channels and other facilities for the increased flows while the October-November wildfires were still burning.

The county, working closely with state and federal agencies and foothill cities, has taken a number of actions – and many more are planned – to protect residents and their property during the four or five years it might take for the land to heal from the damage wrought by the fires.

Crews from various agencies have been going door-to-door in high-risk areas since November warning of the danger.

The county has made hundreds of thousands of sandbags and tons of sand available to residents free of charge at County Fire Stations and other locations, along with instructions on how to use them. Those sandbags saved many properties and probably many lives during the Christmas floods.

The county has distributed more than 5,000 copies of its 27-page booklet, "Debris and Erosion Control" and has placed a link to flood control information on its Internet home page, www.sbcounty.gov. There, residents can get information on what the county is doing to protect them from flooding, and what they can do to protect themselves. The link includes information on where residents can go to pick up sandbags and sand, and instructions on how to use sandbags to divert floodwaters away from homes.

The county has also established a Flood Information Hotline at the county's Emergency Operations Center for residents can call to get information on how to protect themselves. The hotline number is (909) 356-3981.

Other actions taken by the county include:

- On November 18 the Board of Supervisors approved a plan to allocate \$2 million from a flood control self-insurance fund to bolster the county Flood Control District's efforts to remove burned vegetation from canyons and clear out flood control basins

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- In an area stretching from Upland to Highland, the county Flood Control District began clearing several basins of debris, increasing their capacity, while the fires were still burning. Plans are in place to clear several more basins and continue work as rains bring in more debris and sediment.
- The county has placed concrete railing and other temporary blocks to protect neighborhoods from floodwaters.
- The county has purchased and installed additional rain gauges equipped to alert crews when rain levels reach dangerous levels.
- The county Department of Public Works is expediting an order it has placed for surveillance cameras that will be installed at key flood control facilities. Five remote control cameras will be installed at high-priority basins to monitor water flow and debris during storms.
- On November 21 Flood Control Safety Assessment Teams submitted preliminary reports examining all of the county's burned watersheds and drainage facilities. The reports identify immediate needs and large and small projects needed to protect downstream areas from damage. The department is now developing cost estimates for the projects, and evaluating additional work that may be necessary following the Christmas floods.